

A Guide to Adjudication for Teachers

The most important thing to understand when judging is the criteria; even though different judges will implement it slightly differently, the criteria are the key to understanding the debate.

The Criteria

The first rule of judging is that scores do not determine the outcome of a debate. Once you understand the criteria for deciding a debate, you should use those criteria to determine which team won. Then, use scoring criteria to arrive on individual and team scores – those scores should match your decision.

Though this seems counterintuitive, it is necessary to arriving at the right outcome. The goal of a debate is, as a team, is to make a more compelling case than the opposing team. In some cases, one team might speak more eloquently and even make more arguments when, in reality, the other team's arguments are more effective or relevant to the debate. In those instances, initial thoughts around speaker scores might diverge from who should properly win the debate.

In deciding who has won a debate, the best strategy is to break arguments down into constituent issues. Third speakers are often encouraged to look at “points of clash” – major issues in the debate around which both teams have made arguments. Adjudicators should do the same in their adjudications.

To work out what points of clash are relevant to the debate, look both at what is necessary to prove (or disprove) the moot, and at the main arguments each team has made. For example, in a debate about “This House would ban smoking”, the teams might clash over *rights* (making points around freedom versus government protectionism) and then over *harms* (whether smoking is really that bad for you) and also over *consent* (whether addiction revokes consent). If that were the case, those would be your points of clash.

Once those have been established, you should examine the teams' arguments and decide who won each point of clash, and whether they did so conclusively or narrowly. With that done, logic will dictate who has won the debate. In the above example, for instance, if the affirmative team proves that there is no right to smoke and that you can't properly consent to it, they will almost certainly have won the debate.

Some of the most difficult decisions are in “base-race” situations; where each team has won points that don't cancel each other out. One team might prove that invading Syria would cause huge numbers of deaths, while the other team might show that it would create long-term security – if neither team has convincingly explained why their point is most important, you will need to make a value judgement about which point was most important or most conclusively won.

In the end, adjudication should be instinct moderated by an examination of the arguments. There has long been a trend towards rewarding speakers just for speaking well; while this is important, it is equally crucial to reward teams that make mature arguments. Some of the good arguments that you should look out for are:

- Rights analysis (freedom of speech, freedom of religion etc.)
- Role of government arguments
- Incentives analysis (how do people react to certain policies in reality)
- Principled arguments (the role of the justice system, the purpose of feminism etc.)
- Complex factual analysis (eg. how invading Syria would lead to restoring peace via religious reconciliation)

If a team is making these kind of arguments, that is a good indication that the team is debating well.

Scoring

Scoring is ostensibly between 0 and 100, but is actually between 60 and 80. A rough guide would be:

60 – The worst speech you have ever seen at this level; could not possibly be worse

60-65 – A weak speech. The student probably doesn't make time, and their points are undeveloped and largely irrelevant to the debate. Their style is not persuasive.

65-70 – A weak-to-average speech. The student might make time, but few points are of relevance and are only somewhat explained.

70-75 – A strong-to-average speech. The student makes several relevant points and makes a good attempt to explain them. They speak persuasively.

75-80 – A very strong speech. The student uses their time to develop multiple arguments with sophistication. Their speech is compelling.

80 – The best speech you have ever seen at this level; could not be improved upon

A speaker score should include elements of both manner (how persuasively they speak) and matter (how strong the points they make are). Points should not be deducted for failing to make time; the penalty comes in being unable to make as many points or make as complex analysis.

The Ideal Case

A strong case will include a wide range of arguments and rebuttal which cover a range of different angles. Ideally, four to five distinct points across the first and second speaker should be presented. An example of how that might work would be:

This House would abolish jail for all prisoners who do not pose a threat to society

Affirmative team:

1. The purpose of the justice system – the justice system exists to protect people from individuals who breach social rules; as a result, we should aim to rehabilitate criminals in order to prevent harm to future victims.
2. The rights of criminals – because criminals are ultimately driven to their crimes by social factors, society has a responsibility to restore them to being constructive members of society without unduly punishing them

3. The impact of prisons on criminality – prisons become hotbeds of criminality, cutting people off from support networks and institutionalising them to dislike authority; all these factors make them more likely to continue criminal acts when they are released
4. The impact of imprisonment on society – imprisonment alienates criminals, making them seem inhuman; creating a relationship of inhumanity between criminals and victims makes it impossible for them to reintegrate, and also makes it more justifiable for them to commit crimes
5. The impact of prisons on victims – in the long term, witnessing someone become a constructive member of society and genuinely work to restore the damage inflicted is far more beneficial for victims than sheer retribution

As you'll notice, the main points fall into two categories:

- Rights: The first two points in this case are all about rights. These provide a principled basis for the debate and are challenging to make – teams should be rewarded for doing so
- Practical: The remaining three points are practical; these points are about what will happen if the moot is implemented and whether this will be positive or negative. These are not merely “practicalities” and are very important in deciding who won the debate.

Both types of points are important to a good case.